

...A...

COLONIAL TEA



by

KATE WOODWARD NOBLE



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WATERBURY, CONN.



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Cast of Characters

Priscilla Aldish.— A young girl of
today, modern dress.
Ancestress Priscilla Aldish,
Ancestress Mary Standen, } Early
Ancestress Betty Carford, } Colonial
Ancestress Lora Bradver, } Dress.

SCENE.— A parlor, furniture partly modern, partly
antique, with telephone, electric light, etc. Tea table
with four chairs, set with kettle, old china, silver, etc.,
hot water in teakettle, cream, sugar and small cakes.
Large chair at left of stage.

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Scene, a parlor, with both colonial and modern furniture. Enter Priscilla Aldish, in reception dress.

PRISCILLA.

Heigh-ho, I'm tired. I really cannot see
The fun in giving a Colonial Tea.
Why, half the folks don't know what should be done;
They're mortally afraid of any fun,
And if we girls try to steal off one side,
We hear: "My dears, do be more dignified."
I only wish that from the distant shades
Some real Colonial Dames, to us poor maids
Might come and let us watch them, so that we
Could properly conduct our old style tea.

(Yawns).

I am so sleepy. I'm just going to throw
Myself back in this chair that stands here so
Invitingly, and rest an hour. Mayhap **(slowly)**
I shall—feel—brighter—if I get **(yawns)** a nap.

(Sleeps).

(Enter Ancestress Priscilla Aldish in Colonial Dress).

ANCESTRESS P.

It surely did rejoice my spirit, when
Permission to revisit once again
The scenes that knew me in my earthly days
I did receive; to tread once more the ways
I loved in youth. An hour or two is all
That I may spend in this, mine ancient hall;
But, though the time is short, I'll make the most
Of it, and summon to me, from the host
Of old-time friends, my special cronies three,
To spend an hour in this old home with me.

(Steps to back of room and calls:)

Ho, Mary Standen, playmate of my youth!
Ho, Betty Carford, as well loved, in truth!
Ho, Lora Bradver, stately, gracious one!
Come from the past, into the shining sun
Of modern days, and sup with me once more,
As ye were wont to do in days of yore!

(Enter Ancestresses Mary, Betty and Lora, in Colonial attire).

THE THREE (curtseying):

All hail, Priscilla Aldish! Right glad we
Here in thy company again to be!

ANCESTRESS P.

From out the Past, that hides us in its shade,
We have been summoned, that a modern maid
May look on us, and learn by observation
How we, in days of yore, were wont our station
To take, at times, around the social board,
And gossip interchange, while tea was poured.

ANCESTRESS M.

I shall rejoice, as in the days of old,
To hear thy jokes and quips, Priscilla, told;
For I remember well thy merry wit,
And I dare swear thou hast not lost a bit.

ANCESTRESS B.

I, too, am glad to hear again thy speech,
Priscilla; thine too, madcap Mary; each
Had ready tongue in those old days, and I

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Was e'er contented listening to sit by.

ANCESTRESS L.

Methinks ye all of dignity had lack.
I trust today, when we are here called back
In our descendants' interests, there'll be
Little, if aught, of ancient levity.

ANCESTRESS P.

Come, let us look about a bit, e'er we
Proceed to gossip o'er our cups of tea.
(Spies Priscilla).

Why, who is this?

ANCESTRESS B.

Some modern maid, I wis.

ANCESTRESS M.

She's passing fair. I wonder who she is.

ANCESTRESS L.

Why, friends, she's our great-great-great-grand-
daughter!

They say that blood is thicker far than water,
And ours has intermingled, so that she
Related to each one of us must be.

ANCESTRESS P.

Let us now scan her features as she lies
Asleep before us. I can't see her eyes,
But it is certain, as we might suppose,
She has inherited the Aldish nose.

ANCESTRESS M.

It pleaseth me to see the Standen chin.

ANCESTRESS B.

Her cheek the Carford dimple lurks within.

ANCESTRESS L.

The Bradver mouth is hers, without a doubt,
And 'tis the Bradver hand that here peeps out.

ANCESTRESS P.

Well, never mind her, she is sound asleep;
Around this room I want to take a peep.
To see if aught of what I once did prize
Is left today to cheer my longing eyes.
Yes, here's the very table, where with me
You used to sit and sip the cups of tea
I poured for you, and to each other tell
The latest news. They've kept my table well.
Upon this table, ready to our hand,
The cups and saucers, cream and sugar, stand;
The tea is here, for putting in the pot,
And in this kettle, water, steaming hot;
I wonder if she thought the water'd keep
Hot as it should while she was fast asleep;
No matter, time is short: come, take your chairs
Just as when we were young, and free from cares.

(They sit around the table. Ancestress P. makes the tea, the others gaze about the room. Priscilla wakes, stares, rubs her eyes and speaks).

PRISCILLA.

Why, who are these? They're not the girls, I know.
Strangers! Their faces look familiar, though.
I do believe my wish has come to pass;

It's getting dark; if I should light the gas,
I wonder if they'd disappear in fright;
I wouldn't dare try the electric light.
I think I'll speak to them—they all look kind—
I'll be respectful—I don't think they'll mind.

(Rises and goes toward table).

Good evening ladies. I'm so glad to see
You make yourselves at home, and drink the tea.

ANCESTRESS P.

Good evening, child. We hope thou'rt not afraid
Of thy great-great-great-grandmothers, maid.

PRISCILLA.

Oh, are you? Really? Isn't that too sweet
For anything? I've wanted you to meet,
Since I your pictures, hanging on our walls,
Have studied, when Colonial gowns for balls
Or teas were wanted. So you're really here!
I think each one of you is simply dear!
But I would like to see you better, so,
If you don't mind, I'll turn the light on—no,
It won't be any trouble—if too bright
I'll light the gas instead—or, no, I'll light
The candles; that's what I should do, of course.
What's that—I beg your pardon—

ANCESTRESS M.

From what source
Wilt thou for all these candles light procure,
When there's no fireplace open?

PRISCILLA.

Oh, I'm sure
There are some matches in the box. (Looks, strikes a
match and lights candles, while ancestresses stare):
There, now.

ANCESTRESS L.

It looks like witchcraft unto me, I vow.
I'd much prefer to use the flint and steel.

ANCESTRESS B.

But this new way is quicker, a good deal.

(Telephone bell rings. Priscilla answers).

PRISCILLA.

What's that? The cars tied up? 'Twill be an hour
Before they can again put on the power?
Now isn't that a shame? What's that? You'll come
By auto just as soon as Fan's gets home?
All right. Goodbye. (Hangs up telephone).

ANCESTRESS L.

More witchcraft, I declare!
She surely talked with spirits in the air!
Girl, if thy home had been in Salem town,
Thou as a witch wouldest have been written down.

ANCESTRESS P.

Come, come, we're wasting time. Let's drink our tea,
And talk of pleasant things that used to be.
Then, e'er we go, our young descendant here
Shall unto us explain these things so queer;
The world has made great progress since our day;
I'd like to know, before I take my way
With my companions back into the past,
What has been doing, since I sat here last.

(Pours the tea, passes cream and sugar and cakes).

ANCESTRESS B.

These cakes, methinks, are of a flavor fine,
Were they made by those clever hands of thine?
They taste much like the ones I made of old—
The best cakes in the country, I was told.

PRISCILLA.

Yes, I did make those cakes. In an old book
Of recipes, in which I chanced to look,
I found the rule, and thought they would be good;
Cook wasn't going to let me—but I would.

ANCESTRESS L.

To make fine cakes is well enough at times,
When company is due, but down one climbs
To humbler duties when the guests have fled;
Can these same hands of thine make wholesome bread?

PRISCILLA.

N-n-no; you see, the cook makes such a fuss
If we go in the kitchen—says we muss
More than we help—that I don't often try
To make things, though I'd like to see if I
Could do as well as I did with this rule;
I think next fall I'll join a cooking school,
And learn to use the chafing dish with gas,
Or electricity.

ANCESTRESS P.

A pretty pass
Things have come to, if girls no more are taught
To manage their own households, as they ought.

PRISCILLA.

Dear great-great-great-grandmas, as I see
That's the relation that you bear to me,
Did girls in your day have to sit up straight,
And not have any fun? A meal of state
Was such a tea as this? or did you laugh
And joke and chatter gayly? More than half
Our mothers and grandmothers say that we
Aren't dignified enough, when such a tea
We give, to represent the dames who wore
Colonial costumes, years and years before.
I'm pretty sure that you must recognize
The table, chairs, and other things your eyes
Behold, for they are genuine antiques,
A good deal better than the modern freaks.

ANCESTRESS P.

Truly thou speakest; 'tis my table here.

ANCESTRESS M.

And these were once my treasured chairs, my dear.

ANCESTRESS B.

Mine were these cups and saucers, brought o'er sea
And given by my sailor lad to me.

ANCESTRESS L.

And mine the tiny spoons—'twas a rare thing
To own such silver in my day: we'd cling
To what we had through all vicissitudes;
This linen, too, my list of things includes;
I spun and wove it 'gainst my wedding day,
And in my carved oak chest laid it away.

ANCESTRESS P.

Dost thou remember, when we entertained
A band of youths and maidens, who remained
To dance the minuet, when tea was done,
Upon the lawn, as sinking was the sun?
And when one, Mary Standen, led thee down
The path, and looking with his eyes of brown
Into thy face, did speak the words that made
The blood leap to thy cheeks, and, half-afraid,
Thou didst make answer?

ANCESTRESS M.

I remember—yea.
But, friend Priscilla, what hast thou to say?
If I remember rightly, one chose thee
That self-same day, his own true love to be.
And Betty, too, a pretty tale could tell
Of honeyed words, couldst thou not, Betty?

ANCESTRESS B.

Well,

I won't deny that I had my full share.
But then, thou know'st, Hugh Aldish was not there
On that occasion, but far o'er the sea,
And I was waiting his return to me.

ANCESTRESS I.

I laughed, and seemed the gayest of the gay,
As you remember, on that merry day;
But I was sad; for in the happy crowd
I missed John Carford; I was young and proud,
And we had quarreled, so he would not come
To our tea-drinking, but remained at home.
But, as you may remember, in the hour
When we went homeward, there came up a shower;
Of lightning, thunder, I was sore afeared,
I welcomed John, when he to me appeared;
He calmed my fears, and we were reconciled,
Nor cared whether Dame Nature frowned or smiled.

ANCESTRESS P.

Come, come, 'twill soon be time for us to leave;
And I, for one, most certainly would grieve
If certain mysteries were unexplained,
That I have noted while I here remained.
Priscilla, child, speak up and tell us now,
With naught of needless hesitation, how
That light thou didst evoke from bits of stick;
No flint and steel was e'er so marv'rous quick.

PRISCILLA.

Why, 'twas a match I struck—upon the tip
Is phosphorus—or something—that they dip
The match stick in—and when I scratch it—so—
The fire comes as you want it to, you know.

ANCESTRESS L.

I like it not; it dangerous looks to me,
If it be used at all incautiously;
Doth it not lead to frequent devastation
Of property, because of conflagration?

PRISCILLA.

Why—I don't know—sometimes it does, perhaps,
When the stick breaks, because the head then snaps
And falls, and if stepped on, of course it lights;
But then, that doesn't often happen—

ANCESTRESS B.

Frights

'Twould give me that I should not soon forget.
But what are these glass bulbs so queerly set
With loop of wire or thread within?
(**Priscilla turns on electric light**)—all jump and cry:

ALL ANCESTRESSES.

Preserve us!

ANCESTRESS M.

Please don't do that again—it makes me nervous!
What is it, any way?—no wick—no wax,
Tallow or oil—why, everything it lacks
That makes a lamp or candle, yet it shines
Uncannily; my reasoning divines
Some magic here at work—girl, speak and tell
How thou dost work this strange, unholy spell.

PRISCILLA.

'Tis electricity that makes it burn;
But I forgot—perhaps you didn't learn
That lightning could be harnessed; first the gas
From coal we burned—no, oil, in lamps of glass
Or metal gave us light, but now you see,
Though both we use for heat and lighting, we
Are making new improvements day by day,
So gas and oil will soon be done away,
And electricity will do our work—

ANCESTRESS P.

Child, child, thou talkest wild as any Turk;
I haven't understood a word 'twas said;
I think the lightning must have struck thy head.
But there was something else—oh, yes, I know—
Thy conversation of a while ago,
Of "cars" and "autos," when at sound of bell
Thou to the air didst speak—come, quickly tell
What is this wonder.

PRISCILLA.

That's the telephone,
Through which the voice for many miles is thrown;
We talk from here to friends far, far away.

ANCESTRESS B.

I wish they had had such things in my day;
But if they had—I wonder now, friends, which
Of us would first have suffered as a witch.

(Clock gives warning for striking the hour).

ANCESTRESS P.

Methinks the hour has come for us to go
Back to the land of spirits.

PRISCILLA.

Ah, no, no!

My friends will soon be here—they'd love to see
You all and with you drink a cup of tea.

ANCESTRESS P.

We may not stay. E'en now the mystic spell
Draws us away.

ALL ANCESTRESSES.

Farewell, dear child, farewell.

(**Priscilla watches them as they slowly disappear; rubs
her eyes and speaks**).

PRISCILLA.

How very odd; I'm sure I didn't dream,
For here's the tea, the sugar and the cream;
The cups and spoons were used; the cakes are less;
I saw the features of each ancestress,
I heard their voices, too—what fun 'twill be
To tell the girls of my Colonial Tea.



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